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Teeth

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Dramatis Personae:

ONE

TWO

THE SOLDIER

Darkness. Little by little, one can make out a few objects and bodies piled together. Some noises from afar are slowly fading out. ONE enters stage left, groping about. TWO enters stage right groping about. ONE lights a match. TWO lights a match. The two walk forward with difficulty through the pile of bodies and objects. They meet in the middle. They hear a loud scream.

ONE: Did you hear that?

TWO: The barking?

ONE: Wasn't that yelling?

TWO: No, not yelling. Barking.

ONE: I think it's a man.

TWO: It can't be a man. A dog's not a man.

ONE: I hope it doesn't start again...that noise.

TWO: These men can't make any noise anymore. They're dead.

ONE: Maybe there're still a few left...

TWO: Who are they?

ONE: They're deserters...Maybe the deserters are fighting each other...

TWO: Which deserters? What kind of deserters?

ONE: Their deserters and the others' deserters...

TWO: That's bullshit! Deserters never fight each other.

(The matches go out. Darkness.)

ONE: And you?

TWO: Me.

ONE: Did you find anything?

TWO: Not really.

ONE: You're lying.

TWO: I'm not.

ONE: Let me see your bag. Do you have one?

TWO: I do, but it's almost empty. It's not like it used to be.

ONE: Count them! How many did you get?

TWO: Just a few. It's really hard to open up their mouths these days.

ONE: Were they frozen?

TWO: Rock hard.

ONE: Mine had their teeth clenched too.

TWO: I'm sick of this. I've been getting this pain below the ribs. When I bend, my ribs ache terribly. Have you ever felt pain in your ribs?

ONE: It's because of the air. It's getting really cold. When you

bend, the air just slices through you. I'm having trouble with pain too. When I think about it, I get this pain under my eyelid.

TWO: I think we should take off.

ONE: I don't know. Let's just look around one more time. Once more. It's a shame if we didn't look just once more.

TWO: There's nothing left in my half.

ONE: Did you clean it up?

TWO: Absolutely! Cleaned it like a plate.

ONE: This is no life, man.

TWO: The truth is there are too many of them. There didn't use to be so many. Sometimes you can just get lost among them. I've been walking about for three days, and I still can't seem to find my way.

ONE: I've been walking for three days too. If we don't find our way out of here, we'll soon be rotting with them.

TWO: Listen, I feel like I've seen you before.

ONE: I don't know. I don't remember.

TWO: At Waterloo. Didn't we meet at Waterloo?

ONE: I don't know. I don't remember. Maybe we should light a fire. It'll get a lot colder.

TWO: Yes, yes, I've seen you before. I'm pretty sure I saw you at Sedan too. But there used to be a lot more of us then.

ONE: Yeah, some of us quit...

TWO: You know, I've thought about quitting myself. In fact, this is my last job.

ONE: Really?

TWO: I can't bear it anymore. And there's just too much humidity...Sometimes it makes me sick to my stomach...Today's dead don't even resemble yesterday's dead...Do you remember the bodies at Sedan? They were all good quality. Today, you can barely find a handsome one. It's not just that they die hungry, but they also rot faster...They rot like greased lightening...I think it's just scandalous...

ONE: Why does that matter?

TWO: It matters! Of course it does! Just look at these guys here! They've only been dead three days, and already they've started to stink. You can't imagine they were once real people. Let me tell you...Real people don't start stinking so quickly.

ONE: Do you want some chewing gum?

TWO: Excuse me?

ONE: I said, do you want some gum? I found a big pack of chewing gum yesterday.

TWO: And you want to chew gum? You can go crazy from chewing gum. I never do it. Gum sticks to my teeth...And generally speaking, when I'm on duty, I don't really eat anything. I get dizzy if I'm full.

ONE: *(searching through his pockets)* Here's an apple. Do you want it? I've got some eggplant...sunflower seeds ... mint...

TWO: *(suspicious)* Where did you get those?

ONE: *(embarrassed)* I took them...

TWO: Where from?

ONE: I went through a couple pockets...

TWO: You look in their pockets? Are you crazy?

ONE: So what if I look in their pockets?

TWO: It's gross to look in their pockets...How can you look in their pockets? It's one thing to look in their mouths; quite another to look in their pockets. I've never searched anyone's pockets. I can't understand how some people go through others' pockets...

ONE: You know, I'm a little fed up with the whole looking them in the mouth thing. I'm sick of teeth, you know? I can't look at teeth anymore. I simply can't. I always get the feeling that they're rattling in my brain. It's just so much easier with pockets. And it's much more pleasant...You find all sorts of things.

TWO: What if you find photos? It must be horrible to find that. I couldn't bear to touch those greasy photos.

ONE: Why not? You know, they are funny. Trust me, all photos are the same, as if they all have the same wife and the same pair of chubby children. You can't get too emotional with pictures. I've collected hundreds of them...When you see so many, they no longer affect you.

TWO: In any case, what you're doing is disgusting. The true calling has disappeared.

ONE: C'mon, light a match. I want to show you something.

TWO: I don't want to see or know anything.

ONE: Listen.

(TWO lights a match quickly to see where the noises of a sad mechanical ballet are coming from.)

ONE: *(showing him a miniature mechanical ballerina)* Isn't she beautiful?

TWO: *(fascinated)* Where did you find it?

ONE: In a pocket...The body was completely crushed, but the toy's in one piece.

TWO: Do you wind it with a key?

ONE: Of course.

TWO: Can I wind it?

ONE: Wind it! Been listening to it for a few days and can't get enough of it. It's so much better than teeth. I'm telling you, there's nothing much you can do with those teeth. I've got so many that no one wants to buy them anymore. It's been a couple years since I stopped collecting teeth. You should give it up too and switch to pockets.

TWO: I don't know...It's too late for me to change anything...And I don't want to get dirty now at the end of it...

(They can hear a faint scream. Someone is panting next to them.)

ONE: Can you hear that? Barking again.

TWO: No. It's not barking. It's panting.

ONE: Who's panting?

TWO: I don't know.

ONE: It must be a dog.

TWO: It's not a dog. It's a man.

ONE: A man? After three days?

TWO: Some of them make it even if they're bleeding. In fact, the more bleeding, the longer they can hold it off. Back in the day, they died from a little scratch. Nowadays, they like to agonize.

ONE: *(pulling out an arm from the pile of bodies)* I found him.

TWO: Is he warm?

ONE: He's cold alright.

TWO: Then it's not him.

ONE: But I saw him blink!

(He opens the mouth of the wounded.)

TWO: Hey, will you help me for a second?

ONE: Should I light a match?

TWO: *(searching)* No, no. Hold up the back of his head...If he's got any...I can feel them in the dark.

ONE: Well, does he?

TWO: *(feeling for teeth with his fingers)* He does!

(ONE pulls out the tooth using a small pair of tweezers. Lighting up a match, he holds up the tooth above the flame and analyzes it.)

ONE: One? It's a beautiful one.

(The man moans.)

ONE: *(perfidiously)* Will you take a look in his pockets?

TWO: No, not the pockets.

ONE: Why not? You'll have to start one day anyway.

TWO: No, no, I just can't...Trust me...I don't want to mess with pockets...They're damp and dirty...I just can't look. My eyelid's twitching...My fingers are getting soft...You pick his pockets.

ONE: *(searching)* He's got zilch.

TWO: Oh, come on. Nothing at all? Don't hurry. Search carefully.

ONE: Absolutely nothing.

TWO: That's bizarre. Why did this one die for?

ONE: *(triumphantly)* Finally, I got it!

(ONE takes out a key. The man is moaning.)

TWO: Maybe it's his house key...I say you give it back...

ONE: Take a look. Maybe he wants something...

ONE: *(to the man)* What do you want, huh? Do you want the key?

TWO: He doesn't want anything. He's just died.

ONE: It's like he's been waiting for us.

TWO: *(lifting up the tooth)* This tooth...the only thing that kept him alive...

ONE: I say we should really build a fire.

TWO: Build it with what? We've got nothing.

ONE: We can get their shirts. Shirts burn really well.

TWO: Well, morning is coming soon. Why do you need a fire in the morning?

(They hear more moaning, panting, and shuffling of guns.)

ONE: Are you panting?

TWO: I'm not panting. My eyelid's twitching. It's bad when your eyelid twitches. We should get out of here.

ONE: But there's nowhere we can go. Nobody's following us. Why

do you want to leave?

(THE SOLDIER comes maundering through the piles of bodies.)

Eventually, they meet a soldier whose mission is to kill everyone left on the battlefield. He threatens to kill them, but then he falls down and looks as if he is sleeping. The two thieves think about robbing him of his golden teeth, but decide that one cannot rob a sleeping person; they either need to wait for the soldier to wake up or to die. While they are waiting for him to die, they fall asleep next to him. When they wake up, the soldier has disappeared. The world suddenly looks very strange and surreal. They feel something is missing, that they have been robbed of something. The play ends with their wondering what exactly has been stolen from them. In actual fact, the soldier has robbed them of their lives, by killing them.